The Pearl Harbor Attack and Its Background

Past and Present American Attitudes and Perceptions

Harry Wray

How ironic the history of man is! Fifty years ago as a result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent war I learned to hate Japan and the Japanese people. Two of my older brothers graduated from high school early to enter the war. The elder of the two fought at Leyte, Luzon, the Coral Sea, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. A kamikaze pilot dove a plane into his battle ship, the West Virginia, a ship that had suffered severe damage in the Pearl Harbor attack, but, fortunately, the bomb failed to explode and minimum damage was inflicted. The other brother was leaving San Francisco for Okinawa when the war ended. When the war began I was ten years old. By the time it ended I was in the eighth grade full of hate, misconceptions, and misunderstandings about Japan and the Japanese people. Forty-five years later, however, I am living in Japan, teaching in a Japanese national university, and working in a small way to increase Japanese and American mutual understanding and good relations.

How did the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor affect American Attitudes and Perceptions?

For an answer to this question my format is relatively simple. First, I quote at length the foremost authority on the Pearl Harbor attack, Gor-

---

Harry Wray is Professor of Japanese History and International Relations in the Faculty of Economics at Yokohama National University.

don Prange (d. 1980), a naval man and historian, who devoted thirty-seven years to the study of this subject and interviewed hundreds of contemporary Japanese and American participants. Subsequently, I use this quote to address the topic of past and present American attitudes and perceptions regarding the Pearl Harbor attack and its background in detail by citing a spectrum of amateur and professional views. Prange wrote:

> Japan's devastating air strike against Pearl Harbor aroused the people of the United States as no other event in their history ever had. From coast to coast, from north to south, the tragic words rasped over American tongues, burned into American minds. For most Pearl Harbor was . . . *a traumatic shock.*
>
> Yet emotions churned deeper than shock. The American people reeled with a mind-staggering mixture of *surprise,* awe, mystification, grief, *humiliation, and above all, cataclysmic fury.* . . . For one thing, Americans fairly gnashed their teeth at having been played for *suckers.* Certain observers . . . watching cargoes of iron and other strategically valuable materials bound for Japan, had predicted that one day these items would make a *round trip* in the shape of Japanese bombs. . . .
>
> Another fishbone that stuck in the national throat was Japan's initiating the air strike *without formally declaring war. But nothing infuriated the American people more than the attack's having occurred while Japan was carrying on conversations with the United States, ostensibly in good faith, for a peaceful settlement of their mutual problems.* All across the land editorial upon editorial denounced "the sly, cowardly attack executed at the very hour Japan's Machiavellian envoys were conducting 'peace' negotiations. . . . Words failed the Atlanta Constitution to express the utter *duplicity* of the Japanese. . ."
>
> Through all the conflicting emotions ran a thread of relief—relief that Japan had taken the United States off the hook and made the decision for it; relief that the *onus of aggression rested upon the Axis*; relief that the Americans could stop the talk. . . and get on with the real job. . . .
>
> A thunderbolt of such unbelievable magnitude as Pearl Harbor generated a dense fog of confusion as to the purpose and nature of the attack. . . . At first it appeared . . .that "Japan's powers of self-deception now rise to a state of *sublime insanity.* . . . "
>
> Some suggested that the operation may have been *another "Manchurian Incident" with the Japanese armed forces acting independently of the Tokyo High Command.* . . . Yamamoto [Isoroku], however, was a cat of a very different breed from [those] warlords. . . [and]

this time around the civil government could not hold itself technically guiltless. . . .

Not only did the press credit Hitler with presenting to Japan a readymade foreign policy, but it also saw his guiding hand in the strategy of the attack itself. . . . .

But these analyses and speculations could not satisfy the American citizenry. They were less interested in why the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor than in *how they had got away with it.* . . . Thus there began a *frantic, years-long search to find a villain.* . .[1]

The Prange quotation—made some 40 years after the incident— still shows the American fury at Japan and the continued emotional response of Americans to the incident.

How much do Americans continue to be angered by the Pearl Harbor attack?

The answer is that it is still deep among many Americans, particularly elderly Americans. The Pearl Harbor attack created a deep American fury at the Japanese and subsequent Roosevelt-Churchill wartime strategy of emphasizing the European front at the expense of the Asia-Pacific one. This feeling is expressed by one history textbook as follows:

> Stunned and angered by the attack, almost all Americans, including many isolationists accepted Roosevelt's pledge: 'With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounding determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God. . . . This 'Hitler first' strategy was strongly criticized by many Americans who were outraged by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and who wanted revenge. American military commanders in the Pacific also strongly criticized this decision.[2]

Fortunately, little direct anger is directed against Japanese in today's textbooks. In fact, one aspect of Professor Benjamin Duke's analysis twenty years ago of American and Japanese textbooks treatment of World War II is still mostly valid for current high school history textbook's treatment. He concluded that the German War was taught through text and pictures in much more emotional, critical, and personal terms. The Germans emerge "as militarists determined to conquer the world at the price of millions of innocent human beings," while the Japanese War was taught in a more factual and impersonal manner. The Japanese militarists are pictured "primarily as a determined army

with demonstrated war power."[3] German atrocities against the Jews, Belgians, French, and the Slavs are often included, but, strangely enough, Japanese atrocities against the Filipinos, the Chinese, other Asians, and the British and American soldiers are not covered.

Nonetheless, a deep anger still exists among many Americans over 55 or 60 years old. A Kyodo and Gallup Poll's sample of 1001 U.S. citizens aged 18 and older revealed that when Americans think of Japan one-third of them often recall Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, and another 4 percent always think of it.[4] One teacher at the American School of Japan who had taught in the Middle East for approximately 6 years told me that his father-in-law furiously opposed him accepting an assignment to teach in Japan that would take his daughter and grand children there. "Don't you realize those people are the very same ones who treacherously attacked Pearl Harbor, treated our prisoners-of-war savagely, and were responsible for the Bataan Death March," he shouted at his son-in-law. One comment made by the Survivors of the Pearl Harbor organization to the suggestion that Japanese should be invited to take part in the 50th year memorial planned in Honolulu makes Japanese cringe with mortification and anger: "Would you expect the Jews to invite the Nazis to an event where they are talking about the Houlocast."

George Kennan in his brilliant little book dealing with American diplomacy from 1900 to 1950 equated America's foreign policy to be similar to that of a prehistoric monster. The latter lies complacently and self-centeredly in his comfortable environment ignoring insect stings and other threats to his environment. But when the threats become too great the monster awakens with savage fury and such violent actions that he almost destroys his environment. So it was with the Americans with "Remember the Maine" in the Spanish American War, the later American responses to German actions in World War I, and with the American atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Why do Americans feel such fury over the Pearl Harbor attack?

What makes Pearl Harbor such a red flag before the American bull? I believe there are two answers: 1.) they were caught off guard; and, 2.) they were "taken for suckers." The first point is that Americans view the

Pearl Harbor attack as a surprise, a complete surprise. These words are repeated in every American high school history textbook examined. Of course, the actual events demonstrate that the Japanese attack was a complete surprise. But the textbooks fail to deal with the question of whether the attack *should have been* a "complete surprise." That failure is their fundamental weakness, namely the omission of material to deal in a satisfactory way with the reasons for the Japanese-American impasse and the contemporary Japanese psychology.

Eight students interviewed at the American School in Japan do not think it should have been a complete surprise. Fortunately, they are bright and have had good teachers who have exposed them to different historical sources and views. These students thought the American side should have been alert to a possible attack both because we had various warnings and the Japanese military had shown itself to be aggressive in other areas of East and Southeast Asia. These students demonstrate the common sense that our military and highest civilian authorities were guilty of military unpreparedness.

But the students also thought Japan paid very dearly for its "stupidity." It didn't seem like a very smart move," said one. Another student said, "Yes, it was an American disaster, but it was much more of a disaster for the Japanese side." A 31-year-old nephew, who has lived in Kobe for three years, noted that we redoubled the payment by sinking many Japanese ships at the Truk lagoon," more than the Japanese had sunk at Pearl Harbor."

Americans don't like "being taken for suckers." The feeling among many older Americans is that the immediate pre-Pearl Harbor diplomacy (and Japanese trade and business policies of the past two decades) took advantage of our sense of fair play and our generousity. There is no doubt they were deeply angered by the Japanese action of planning war while feigning diplomacy. Almost every textbook examined notes these Japanese actions, but more matter of factly than Americans of 50 years ago. One textbook, however, commented critically;

> Just before 8 o'clock on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 while Japanese diplomats were pretending to discuss peace at the White House, a fleet of 191 [sic 350] Japanese warplanes attacked American airfields and Pearl Harbor. The attack was a perfect surprise — and the greatest military disaster in American history."[5]

I believe that almost all Americans over 60 still carry around in their heads the December 7th picture (December 8th Japan time) of the two diplomats, Kurusu Saburo and Nomura Kichisaburo. That is one of two men smiling in front of the State Department building minutes after having broken off the Japanese-American talks while simultaneously American ships and lives were being lost at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines. An American graduate student of International Relations at Tokyo University has called to my attention that the word "japped" is even found in some dictionaries as a general term for a sneaky, dirty action. Personally, I have to admit that one side of me is still moved emotionally by the failure of the Japanese side to have failed to provide the American side with at least 24 hours notice of a cessation in those negotiations. This feeling emanates from my regret that the issue remains as a lingering, open sore which still adversely affects Japanese-American relations.

The other side of me is that of an American scholar of Japan; and, I react in two ways. I know that the contemporary American government deliberately failed to tell the American people that the Japanese smile was a typical one of embarrassment, a "grin and bear it" expression made during a difficult time. I know also that neither diplomat knew where or when when the actual attack would come. Today, I do not appreciate that the government and mass media manipulated my mind. But that is the awful nature of war. Further, as I note in a historical introduction to a book edited recently:

> Fifty years after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, historians can perceive with less passion and greater clarity the basic causes for the Pacific War. Even the attack on Pearl Harbor, which led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to claim that December 7, 1941, (December 8, Japan time) would remain forever "a date which will live in infamy." seem less treacherous in retrospect. When the Japanese launched surprise attacks in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the contemporary Western press objectively praised these well-executed strikes as brilliant tactical maneuvers. American military authorities in the 1920s and 1930s carried out maneuvers based on simulated Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor that were surprisingly similar to the real one. Furthermore, the Japanese assault, destructive as it was, was launched to destroy specific military targets. Although the Japanese bombed civilian populations in China, these attacks were not on the massive

scale of the subsequent indiscriminate bombings of civilian populations by Germany, Great Britain, and ultimately the United States.[6]

How does the American anger over being caught off-guard and being "played for suckers" translate into feelings regarding the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings?

Some Americans and Japanese claim that those bombings represent American racism. Why didn't the Americans use atomic bombs against the Germans? This question overlooks the obvious fact that the atomic bombs were not perfected until after war with Germany ceased. I do not doubt that most contemporary Americans (as well as too many still today) were racists. In fact, however, some scientists involved in the Manhattan Project, many Jewish and anti-Nazi, signed a petition requesting President Truman to cancel the atomic bombing of Japan, but General Leslie R. Groves, commander of the project, delayed the delivery of the petition. But the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not racist in motivation, but a result of fury, revenge, and. mostly, a simple mathematical equation that one million *American* lives would be saved by them. The same logic would have prevailed had an atomic bomb existed while we were still fighting the Nazis, especially before "D" Day and the invasion of Normandy. Of course, there were military leaders of the time who disputed both the necessity of using the atomic bombs, General Dwight Eisenhower and Admiral William Leahy to name two, and the claim that one million American lives would be lost by a military invasion of Japan.

There is also the question of whether Americans should apologize for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in return for a Japanese apology for the Pearl Harbor attack. Whether Japanese like it or not the simple fact is that many Americans over 55 would never forgive an American President for such an apology. In their thinking there is absolutely no logical linkage between these two events. For them the American action is only a matter of justice, two bombings which occurred simply as a means to hasten the end of the war and to make retribution against an enemy which initiated the war and cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of American, British, and other Allied countries' citizens. A recent telephone poll of 998 Californians showed that 60 percent of the respondents thought the atomic bombings were justified because they led

to the ending of the war; only 28 percent thought they were a bad thing.[7] The same Kyodo-Gallup Poll poll mentioned earlier showed that two-thirds of all Americans sampled thought these atomic bombings were necessary. Only two in ten argued that the bombings were not justified under any circumstances. (Incidentally, I have found that in speaking on this issue that many younger Japanese are astonished and keenly disappointed by the American view revealed by these statistics. They find the Americans reactions difficult to reconcile with their Christian faith and high premium placed on justice and moral principals)

The same American graduate student at Tokyo University mentioned previously related that his father, a survivor and critic of the Pearl Harbor attack, usually expresses a philosophical attitude about Japanese atrocities during the war as "they were too bad, but war is hell. "But the same father becomes almost livid on the subject of Americans apologizing for Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. In fact, when a group of students from the local school visited Hiroshima and made such an apology, the father, and others of a similar mood, wrote furious letters to the local newspaper criticizing the students and the school authorities for allowing such an outrageous American apology. I think this is probably a hard pill for Japanese to swallow; however, my task is not to flatter, but to write the truth as I see it.

Many Americans, especially younger ones, who have lived or are now living in Japan, however, are less confident that the atomic bombings were justified. Their attitude may reflect three factors. First, their daily interactions with Japanese influences them to see the Japanese as *real people* rather than as statistics or "Japs." Second, they are horrified and moved to reflection by visiting the atomic bomb peace memorial at Hiroshima. Third, that experience may have been reinforced by an article, book, or a television documentary which maintains that the war could have been ended without the costly land invasion cited to justify the atomic bombings. Accordingly, the ASIJ students interviewed do not believe that the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings were acceptable retribution for the Pearl Harbor attack. The bombings "were not necessary whatsoever;" nor should they be linked with current Japanese and American economic friction. One student said, "Using such slogans as "Remember Pearl Harbor" in trying to alienate Americans toward Japanese in the present relationship or to make Americans boycott Jap-

anese goods in favor of American goods would make me angry. That was a very long time ago. It has nothing to do with now." Another student said the attack on Pearl Harbor has "no relationship with the present. It is stupid to talk about 'Remember Pearl Harbor' in terms of today's Japanese- American friction. After we dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Pearl Harbor I think we got more than even." My nephew said, "I don't feel angry or shocked about the Pearl Harbor attack, but I do when I see the atomic dome or go through the Atomic Bomb Peace Memorial in Hiroshima. There should be absolutely no linkage between trade friction and cries of 'Remember Pearl Harbor' because it is sheer American emotionalism to link two unrelated issues. It may be effective in reducing American consumption of Japanese goods, but it is a type of racism and propaganda that bothers me."

How do Americans account for the seeming contradiction of Japan planning the war while pursuing diplomacy?

Essentially, two views prevail here which can be seen in the Prange quotation. First, the Japanese action is blamed on the Japanese military. Second, it is viewed as resulting from insane leaders and a blind, sheeplike people who stupidly followed their leaders. This American attitude toward countries with whom we have strong differences or go to war is all too common. We see it in the contemporary American characterization of both Mussoluni and Hitler as insane. We see it recently in the same simplified view of Libya's Khadalfi and Iraq's Saddam Hussein. This kind of thinking fails to attribute genuine causes for foreign leaders' actions and makes it unnecessary for the public to attempt an understanding of deeper causes.

The view still prevails among most of the American public that the Japanese military were responsible for pulling off another Manchurian Incident by the Pearl Harbor attack because they were in complete control. This view that the military were in control still prevails as the theme of American high school history textbooks. One textbook after discussing the army's responsibility for a coup in March 1931, the Manchurian Incident, the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo, and the February 26, 1936 Incident, stated, "Afterward, any politicians who stood in the way of the army's plans lived in fear for their lives.

Gradually, the military extended its control over the government."[8] Another textbook next to a caption entitled, "Who controlled the government in Japan?" commented:

> By the time Hitler's army entered the Rhineland, Japan was well on its way to becoming a military dictatorship. Japan still had an emperor, but Hirohito had no power. Politicians no longer were very important in Japan, especially among the Japanese peasants. The army and, to some degree, the navy were dominating the government. Trade and industry were growing, and Japan wanted more sources of raw materials. It also wanted to become a world power. Japan was trying to expand its territory by taking over land in Asia, especially in China.

Four pages later we learn from the same source, "While the talks between the United States and Japan were going on, Japanese military leaders were making plans for a war against the United States. The Japanese wanted certain areas in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. They did not think they could do this without first weakening the United States.[9]

Secretary of State Cordell Hull's biographer, Jonathan Utley, stated in a symposium commemorating the 50th year of the Pearl Harbor attack:

> So deeply entrenched in the American consciousness is this perception of Japan the warrior state, that while Americans might debate whether or not the atomic bombs should have been dropped they will not question whether the war had to be fought in the first place. . . . This popular American perception of Japan as an inherently aggressive state was also the dominant perception of Japan among the government officials who managed United States foreign policy. [10]

By pinning the war only on Japanese militarists the textbooks demonstrate both that: a.) they are not current with recent scholarship on Japanese political history of the 1930s; and, b.) they accept the view that the war was inevitable. This approach makes the U.S. less culpable for the failure of contemporary Japanese-American negotiations. One irate Maui newspaper reporter reviewing our work, *Pearl Harbor Reexamined,* said Professor Conroy and I "wanted the answer to the question of whether the war was inevitable "to be no." He complained, most of its contributors "persist in appeasing Japanese militarism in 1990." He continued, "The only ones who really influenced domestic affairs in

Japan were the young officers, by their inveterate habit of shooting the prime minister [sic]." [11]

Of course, there is much to be said for the view that the military exerted great influence over Japanese diplomatic actions after 1936, but it is seen today as a much more complicated story. That the war was inevitable because the military were in control strongly prevails among scholars who have no knowledge of Japanese sources. When I gave a trial run of my lead essay in *Pearl Harbor Examined* dealing with causes for the Pacific War from 1898 to 1941, non-specialist historians argued the same thesis and criticised me for being pro-Japanese. The argument that it was not a matter of being pro-Japanese, but rather of being deeper in American-Japanese sources, carried no weight with them. Although they would not want to be challenged on the validity of research of the the last fifty years regarding events in their special areas, they were unwilling to recognize the new scholarly research that differed from that of when they were graduate students 20 to 40 years ago.

Today's American scholars of American-Japanese diplomacy and of Japanese history and Japanese political science dealing with the 1930s are much more sophisticated. They know that the underlying causes of the Pacific War were complex and remote as well as immediate and direct. Few of them would deny that Japanese foreign policy and military expansion, especially in the 1930s, were the most important factors. Japan did commit clear aggression in East and Southeast Asia in the 1930s. Today, however, as a result of more objective and sophisticated studies, most non-Marxist scholars no longer simply equate Japan with the totalitarian Nazi regime in Germany or facilely support the simplistic conspiracy theses of the Tokyo Military Tribunal. Nor do they simply portray Japan as an aggressor and the United States as an innocent victim.

What do these two perceptions that the Japanese leadership was insane and that the military was in such complete control that war could not be averted reveal?

They tell us as much about American attitudes as they do of the Japanese side. They demonstrated a strong tendency by Americans to see their enemy as acting from irrational factors. They blind them to their own

complacency and an understanding of whether there were legitimate reasons for Japan's actions. It also reveals American racist attitudes and a pronounced tendency to underestimate an enemy and to overlook the widespread support that its leadership may have from a wide segment of society. Our senior advisor on Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department, Stanley Hornbeck, could write on July 23, 1941 and say to a young Foreign Service officer in mid-November that no action which the United States would take in the Pacific was likely to cause the Japanese to act against the United States. On November 27, 1941 he was so brashly confident that he wrote in a memorandum, "the Japanese Government does not desire or intend or expect to have forthwith armed conflict with the United States."[12] These over-confident attitudes were the supreme mistakes of the Americans in the background leading to the Pacific War, the Korean War, and the Vietnamese War. They were overcompensated for recently by exaggerating the military strength, strategy, and capability of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Contemporary Americans had such a poor estimation of Japan's economy and Japanese military technology, strength, planning, tactics, and strategy that a few even thought Germans flew some of the Japanese planes over Pearl Harbor.

Even today the textbooks fail to note the American overconfidence, complacency, arrogant, and racial attitudes of the time. That generation saw only an imitative Japanese who lacked American's vision, creativity, and daring. Secretary Stimson's April 1941 report to President Roosevelt stated that the Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, believed that "Hawaii was impregnable whether there were any ships left there or not; that the land defense was amply sufficient, together with the air defense, to keep off the Japanese."[13] The Japanese could not possibly have planned and executed such a bold and precise attack on the United States. Although Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox's investigative report had reported to President Roosevelt already on December 14, 1941 that the most important reason for the Pearl Harbor disaster was superior Japanese planning and execution. the quality of the Pearl Harbor attack was not fully appreciated until Prange's *At Dawn We Slept.* Two subsequent books, one by Prange, Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon, *December 7 1941* (London: Harrap, 1988) and another of late 1990 by Michael Slackman, *Target: Pearl Harbor* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press and Arizona Memorial Museum Association, 1990) are

fulsome and detailed in their praise of the outstanding quality of Japanese military equipment, the bold naval planning, brilliant execution of the attack, and the quality of the Japanese pilots. Perhaps one reason why Americans have a greater appreciation for such a message today is the excellence of current Japanese technology and industrial planning and execution.

Americans made a serious miscalculation regarding a possible surprise attack on Pearl Harbor because we miscalculated Japanese psychology in two areas. In particular, Professor Chihiro Hosoya thinks American foreign policy before the Pearl Harbor attack was misguided because, "The advocates of the hard-line policy toward Japan misunderstood the psychology of the Japanese . . . ," particularly the middle level officers in the army, navy, and foreign service. The latter along with ultranationalists and militarists saw Japan encircled and persecuted by American, British, Chinese, and Dutch (ABCD) military and trade policies in East and Southeast Asia. Although Japanese aggression finally led the ABCD powers to impose sanctions against Japan, they confused cause and effect. Hence, the demand of the American hard-liners for economic sanctions against Japan played into these middle level officers and officials hands. They argued that the imposition of economic sanctions by the United States necessitated risky Japanese expansion. In such a climate Japanese moderates found it impossible to counsel caution and accommodation. This kind of condition created a desperation to break out of this encirclement and to achieve self-sufficiency in petroleum, strategic war materials, and raw materials by a southward advance.[14] Even my eldest brother said: "I think our policies by 1940 put the Japanese in a position where they felt they had no other choice, but to fight their way out of that condition in some way." But most Americans only interpreted the Japanese southward advance as examples of naked aggression, insincerity, and opportunism—i.e. taking advantage of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union.

The dominant elements in the American government and army and navy, unlike Ambassador Grew and others knowledgeable about the Japanese mentality, failed to understand the samurai mentality of the Japanese leadership. They expected the Japanese to act according to their own rational calculations, not on the basis of a thousand year samurai tradition. Grew cautioned the State Department on this point when

he wrote on November 3, 1941 that "Japanese sanity cannot be measured by our own standards of logic."[15] Disregarding such advice, Hornbeck and other hard-liners predicted that Japan would never dare attack the United States, given Japan's military and economic weaknesses. They failed to perceive that proud samurai facing the strong possibility of defeat might elect to fight their way out of a situation involving loss of face and the Meiji period's goal of great power status by risking a daring and devastating war and surprise attack on the enemy. Thus Admiral Yamamoto Isoruku opposed war with the U.S., but thought the only way to carry out such a war was by a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. He even went further. With other officers he planned to seize and occupy Hawaii as part of an "Eastern Operation." Or the samurai War Minister, Tojo Hideki, could admonish an ambivalent Prime Minister Konoe that there comes a time in a man's life when he must take a huge risk and, with his eyes closed, jump "from *Kiyomizu-dera*" (a famous Kyoto temple overlooking a huge, deep ravine). Or an eccentric Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke could justify brinkmanship diplomacy by saying that "if you want to obtain a tiger cub, you have to be willing to enter the tiger's den." If Japanese had a samurai mentality, it meant they had a very strong sense of pride, would not act as rationally to pressure as the American hard-liners thought, and might even attack the United States because of their belief that *yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit) would prove victorious over alleged American materialism and weakness of character.

Prange's quote indirectly alludes to a contemporary American pride, arrogance, and racism that continues to influence American attitudes toward the Pearl Harbor attack and Japan. Pride and racism are related to the reason why a few Americans thought Germany must have planned and executed, at least in part, the Pearl Harbor attack. It was a bitter blow to a proud people that we could be caught "with our pants down. "The sheer success of the attack by an enemy that had been hitherto so grossly underestimated and disparaged was thoroughly humiliating, and probably made the "sneakiness" of the Japanese all the more contemptible. John Dower's book, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), amply documents American (and Japanese) racism. Prange and Michael Slackman's recent work also elaborate on racist attitudes that played a role in the pre

and post-Pearl Harbor attitudes. Slackman strongly criticizes American military leaders in Pearl Harbor and top officials in Washington D.C., including Knox, for racism and an obsession with potential sabotage by local Japanese. He writes,

> The fixation on the supposed danger posed by Hawaii's Japanese-American community played a crucial role in shifting the army's psychological focus away from the danger of overseas attack. The constellation of racial attitudes then predominant in the armed forces, the Territory of Hawaii, and American society as a whole led Hawaii's defenders to view the islands' Japanese as an ominous alien presence awaiting the signal to do the emperor's bidding. American citizenship, shared values, and overt declarations of loyalty meant nothing to those held in thrall by the fifth-column menace.[16]

Fortunately, wartime Japanese-Americans' patriotism silenced those American doubts and contributed to a greater maturing of American democracy.

The subsequent Japanese achievements and the American decline in economic and technological predominance in some ways makes it easier for later generations of Americans to accept and understand the potentiality of the Japanese to mount an attack of the quality of Pearl Harbor. But in my view this strong sense of American pride, as well as other more advanced Western nations, is undoubtedly one, and only one, factor in some American scholars, politicians, businessmen, and scientists negative criticisms of current Japan. It is psychologically painful for some Americans to admit our own shortcomings and to recognize Japanese strengths, even superiorities in some areas. Although it is true that the Japanese achievement has not been without casualties, in my view this sense of pride is one factor in the current tendency to examine the dark side of many aspects of Japanese economy, education, society and culture. Similarly, pride and a sense of shame are reasons that Japan's Ministry of Education finds it difficult to permit textbook authors to give a more truthful account of Japanese atrocities during World War II and Japan's indebtedness to Americans for Occupation reforms.

How do American racism, underestimation and miscalculation of the enemy leadership and their societal support, and the tendency to deny legitimate reasons for Japanese actions affect American judgment and standards?

It results in a righteous point of view which puts all the blame on an enemy. Issues are seen in black and white terms. These attitudes prevent Americans from seeing how their actions may have been partially responsible for Japanese behavior. It also reflects a characteristic of American diplomancy, namely the failure of Americans to see American policy as unmotivated by real national economic interests. This view of American "innocence" which is still prevalent today also helps to explain the above American reaction to the question of whether Americans should apologize for the atomic bombs. In the American perception there is nothing to apologize for since Americans were not at all responsible for the war. The tendency of contemporary Americans was to see themselves as morally innocent victims of a hypocritical, immoral, and congenitally aggressive and militaristic Japanese state. Our attitude was overly simplistic. We were the good guys; the Japanese were the bad guys. We had truth and principles on our side; the Japanese side only had a maliciously aggressive expansionist design to subjugate East and Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders to a foolish divine mission and self-serving economic goals. Utley was moved to make the observation that the way the Roosevelt administration looked at Japan was similar in one respect to the way the Truman and Eisenhower administrations viewed the Soviet Union. He stated, "In each case there was the assumption that the other power represented an evil empire whose single purpose was to conquer other lands. Diplomacy was useless because the evil empire would not keep any agreement negotiated with it."[17] These attitudes reflect a Christian view of a world of absolute values and a war between good and evil.That kind of thinking contributes both to the strength and weakness of American diplomacy.

Fortunately, current American high school history textbooks are not so simplistic as those of two decades ago in their explanation of the motivation for Japanese expansion. In contrast to Benjamin Duke's previous findings, I discovered that only one current history textbook describes "the Japanese belief in the divinity of the Emperor as a fundamental cause underlying Japan's policy of expansionism during

the 1930's."[18] That is the good news.

The bad news is that the textbooks create the strong impression of American innocence by portraying a passive, reasonable, fair, and just America. Aggression is something that happens to America; it is not something that American policies and actions create. There is little indication that American policies or actions may have been responsible for driving Japanese to take a certain action or that Americans actions were based on vital national economic interests. Instead the United States is portrayed as the friends of the down-trodden and the victims of aggression. America's support for lofty principles of non-aggression, justice, freedom, democracy, national territorial integrity, and freedom of trade in China is repeatedly contrasted with Japanese goals in China, as well as with actions by such nations as Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the totalitarian Soviet Union. The American endorsement of the Open Door Policy for China is trumpeted, but there is no discussion of our vacillation on that policy. There is little indication in the textbooks that Japan's geographical propinquity to China, its absolute dependence on outside nations for raw materials and foodstuffs, and its economic panics and recessions of the 1920s might give Japan a different and legitimate point of view. Some textbooks scold contemporary American public opinion for isolationist attitudes and criticize other peoples who ignore justice and humanity. Thus one textbook commented, "The Japanese withdrew from the League [of Nations] and in 1937 attacked weak China. The democracies of western Europe uttered bold, brave words against the Japanese, but they were afraid to act. They preferred to let Japan enslave Asian millions rather than risk war themselves."[19] There is only limited recognition that Japan proved a cooperative nation with the post-Versailles order during the 1920s.

We do not learn from the textbooks that the American tariff policies placed enormous hardships upon Japan, and was one, and of course only one, direct cause of Japan's move into Manchuria. Only three textbooks mention the Hawley-Smoot tariff in connection with other nations. Oddly enough they mention this tariff as imposing severe hardships on "weak European economies" or on Latin America, but incredibly they fail to mention any impact on Japan.[20] We learn from them that America was negotiating in good faith, but sinister militarists were involved in establishing an exploitative Greater East Asia Co-Pros-

perity Sphere (one text referred to this appellation as "a fancy name for Japanese domination of the Far East"[21]) and a premeditated attack on Pearl Harbor. Hence we often find a Roosevelt, Stimson, Hull, or American people "angered" and "shocked" by Japanese actions in Manchuria, Nanking, on the Yangtze for the bombing of the Panay, or Pearl Harbor.

Of course, the textbooks and contemporary American attitudes reflect an absolute value culture. Just prior to and during the Persian Gulf War I was struck over and over again by the similarities between these American attitudes and perceptions and those of the Pearl Harbor period. One point that particularly stood out in both instances was the American insistence on principles. In this context, it should be noted that just prior to and during the Persian Gulf crisis President Bush was reading a biography of Henry Stimson, Secretary of State in the Hoover administration during the Manchurian Incident and Secretary of War from 1940 during the Roosevelt Administration. Stimson was a man of strong moral principles and an exponent of the idealistic-moralistic-legalistic approach to American foreign policy. On one occasion Stimson said, "The only way to treat Japan is not to give in to her on anything." People close to President Bush remarked that he was citing Stimson frequently during this time as support for his policies against Iraq. On the one hand, Bush's approach meant, unlike in the Manchurian Incident, that America and its allies stood up against aggression; on the other hand, it also meant that American negotiations with Iraq proved rather inflexible on a number of items because of Bush's adherence to his principles and his attack on the morality of Saddam Hussein.

As Utley put it, the American ideology "being absolute and unchanging it blocks alternate perspectives. One cannot see the other person's point of view."[22]

Was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor really a surprise attack? Should it be viewed as a treacherous, sneaky action?

These questions return us to the issue raised by the citation from Prange's book, namely, whether there is a villain or a smoking gun that can be discovered. Let me be frank. I think there is a built in bias on this issue. Most Americans are prone to exonerate Roosevelt of sufficient

knowledge of a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Similarly, my perception is that some Japanese are prone to excuse their action by eagerly grasping at one or more of the many theses of the American revisionist school's, all inspired by an undieing bias and hatred for President Roosevelt, namely, that the President knew of the attack in advance, but allowed it to occur in order to commit the United States to the war in Europe. They forget that President Roosevelt, acting on top secret urgings from Ambassador Kurusu and Second Secretary Hidenari Terasaki "to go over Tojo's head," which were personally dangerous for them, demonstrated a sincere wish to avoid war by his last hour telegraphic appeal to Emperor Hirohito through Ambassador Grew of December 6, 1941, a telegram deliberately delayed by Japanese military authorities until after the war began.[23]

In my view these "revisionist" Japanese should avoid sidetracking the issue by emphasizing Roosevelt's alleged advance knowledge of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor for two reasons. First, this action avoids accepting full responsibility for Japan's planned attack and ten years of Japan's military aggression prior to that date. This approach does not dignify Japan. This evasion of responsibility is similar to the denial of Japanese atrocities in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia by some Japanese that continues to bedevil Japan's relationship with her neighbors. In fact, by diverting the issue the "revisionist" Japanese unnecessarily perpetuate a lack of respect from Americans, her Allies, and occupied peoples of East and Southeast Asia. Japanese need to remember that as a result of a September 4 Liaison Conference, sanctioned by a September 6, 1941 Imperial Conference, that the Japanese government decided on war and the Navy immediately proceeded with its plan to attack Pearl Harbor on November 16th. Only inadequate fleet preparations led to a postponement of the attack until December 7th. Further, some Japanese also evade responsibility for Japan's premeditated attack by arguing that the unyielding Hull Note of November 26th (labeled the Hull "ultimatum" by many Japanese) gave the Japanese no other choice. The Japanese task force, however, already had embarked for Pearl Harbor from Hitokappu Bay on November 25th, one day *before* the Hull Note.

Nor should Japanese seek to evade the issue by grasping at the recent revelation that Roosevelt had tentatively authorized a plan to bomb Japan from China five months prior to the Pearl harbor attack.[24] On the

one hand, there is no denying that Roosevelt's action takes some of the sting from the American righteousness over Japan's surprise attack, but the important point to be noted is that Roosevelt did not implement the plan. That he did not is consistent with Roosevelt's repeated view that American could not make an unprovoked attack on Japan. It is also consistent with his tendency to please any advisor who came to him with a pet proposal.

Research of the past forty years has thoroughly discredited the revisionist theses.[25] It has been impossible to pin direct knowledge of an attack on Roosevelt despite nine official inquiries into Pearl Harbor. The congressional investigation of 1946 took more than 10,000 pages of testimony. Thirty-nine volumes resulted from it. Because Republicans were hungry for victories in the Congressional election of 1946 and the Presidential election of 1948, they were eager to prove that Roosevelt had foreknowledge of Japanese plans to attack Pearl Harbor. They failed to accomplish that goal, as has every subsequent historian.

Roosevelt's most detailed biographer's earnest efforts to find sources to indicate Roosevelt's prior knowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack has been in vain. He maintains that Roosevelt's passionate love for the navy would never have allowed him to commit the Pacific Fleet to such destruction to get the U.S. into war with Japan and Germany.[26] Other historians have argued that it was not necessary to allow a good portion of the Pacific Fleet to be destroyed to involve the United States in war. If Roosevelt knew in advance, he could have accomplished the same objective and saved much of his fleet by luring the Japanese fleet near Pearl Harbor and then boldly attacking them on December 6 (American time). He could have taken such an action without fear of incurring mortally damaging American isolationist criticism.

That Americans in high places knew the Japanese would initiate war by an attack is clear. What was not clear was where and when it would come. They *did not believe* it would come at Pearl Harbor.

But some will say what about the Americans knowledge of the various Japanese codes, including Magic. Nothing in Magic, however indicated where and when the attack would come. What about the messages that went back and forth between Japanese naval authorities in Tokyo and the vice-consul in Honolulu, Yoshikawa Takeo. They demonstrated inordinate Japanese interest in the movement of ships in and out of Pearl

Harbor, its naval and army defenses, and the exact placement of the vessels moored there. According to Slackman, those dispatches were assigned low priority in Washington D.C. Senior U.S. officials were in fact barely aware of them. So low was the priority assigned to that consular traffic that U.S. listening stations *mailed* the intercepts to Washington rather than relaying them by radio. Even more incredibly, they were not communicated to naval authorities in Pearl Harbor. Barbara Wohlsetter and Slackman's research on U.S. intelligence efforts demonstrates that there was extremely poor coordination, inter-service rivalry, mismanagement, an inadequate Japanese language staff, lack of priorities, and confusion from the excessive "noise" of so many telegraphic messages.[27] What about John Toland's claim in *Infamy* that Roosevelt knew of the Japanese attack because of a break in radio silence picked up from Nagumo's task force, a claim absolutely denied by every Japanese connected with that operation? Toland's supporting evidence has been thoroughly discredited by very serious research.[28]

Two other arguments remain. One that Roosevelt should have known arises from the uncomfirmed belief that the Japanese fleet was discovered half-way across the Pacific by the Soviet freighter *Uritsky*. The hypothesis is that the Soviet commander must have radioed the Soviet Union, that Stalin was informed, that Stalin wired Churchill, and that Churchill informed Roosevelt. There are a great many suppositions here. Given the character of Stalin and his own objective of getting the United States in the war is it difficult to believe that he would withhold such information? If Stalin informed Churchill, does it necessarily follow that the latter would inform Roosevelt. After all Churchill also wanted the United States in the war, of course, preferably without another one in the Pacific. Recent writings by Englishmen and Australian cryptographers indicate that they also had broken the Japanese naval code. They deduced from all that information that a Japanese attack was forthcoming, even a possible one on at Pearl Harbor. But as Slackman writes of both Churchill and Stalin, given their own objectives, "it is conceivable that either or both would have chosen the course of realpolitik, but the question is unanswerable on the basis of evidence now available."[29] Some Japanese are waiting eagerly for the declassification of the British materials in 1992 on the supposition that those records will show a telegram sent by Churchill to Roosevelt regarding the Japanese fleet's

movement to Pearl Harbor. I end my presentation, however, by repeating what I said earlier. I believe that Japanese are wanting to find a smoking gun in Roosevelt's hands. We might find it in Stalin or Churchill's hands. But then again those documents may have been destroyed.

Conclusion: What can Japanese and Americans learn from the Pearl Harbor attack?

For both sides there are lessons to be learned from history in the hope that the mistakes of yesterday will not be repeated as misunderstanding and tension again rise between these two giant nations. One lesson is that leaders are human and prone to make mistakes. History is replete with examples of actions which from hindsight seem ridiculously mistaken. For example, Stalin was repeatedly advised by Richard Sorge, the German spy in Japan, that Hitler would invade the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. He refused to believe it. Similarly, the British, the Americans, and other European countries believed that Hitler would attack England first, rather than the Soviet Union. We need to remember that intelligence is not perfect; that even when it is accurate political leaders may fail to act upon it because of prejudiced attitudes and misperceptions. From hindsight the terrible unpreparedness of the Americans at Pearl Harbor defies belief. But it is the sheer number and depth of the mistakes which I believe can only make it understood as a surprise attack.

A second lesson is that the suprise attack on Pearl Harbor was a natural, logical reaction of a nation feeling surrounded and under seige and of a people feeling threatened and paranoid. For this feeling of the Japanese, the Americans must take part of the blame as a result of the inflexible "all or nothing" policy which Utley characterizes Secretary of State Hull as practicing against Japan. [30]

We Americans need to put Japan's surprise attack in greater historical perspective. After all surprise attacks occur when nations feel they serve their needs; historically, they are not all that rare. A British Army officer and historian, Sir Frederick Maurice, concluded that between 1700 and 1870 there were 270 surprise attacks. Among them France carried out 36 surprise attacks, Britain 30, Austria 12, Russia and Prussia seven

each, and the United States at least five. One of those five was a sneak attack on Mexico in 1846 prior to a congressional declaration of war. The hero of that attack, Zachary Taylor, was elected President of the United States two years later! Many Western journalists hailed Israel's brilliant surprise attack of June 1967 when it almost entirely destroyed an Egyptian Air Force on the ground.[31] The Japanese surprise attack on Vladivostock which destroyed most of the Russia's Far Eastern fleet was praised objectively by Western journalists in 1904. Given Japan's poor odds and resources against the American side in 1941, why should its attack not continue to be seen as brilliant military strategy against a sleeping, overconfident, complacent Goliath rather than a "sneaky and treacherous attack."

Japanese must accept major responsibility for the war's causes, but they may assert that given American's unwillingness to compromise Japan felt it had no other course. By a surprise attack Japan could offset America's overwhelming advantages by a crippling blow that would weaken her capacity to wage war. America's unwillingness to compromise with Japan's objectives meant that the Japanese felt they had no other course but war. That being the case a surprise attack was not treacherous, but in Clausevitz's words, "war is the pursuit of diplomacy by other means." Japanese may accept responsibility and credit for a well planned and executed attack rather than diverting the issue to whether Roosevelt had prior knowledge. Both peoples should reflect deeply on the fundamental meaning of the outbreak of this war: what actions did we fail to take as societies and governments at the time to keep our two nations from plunging into that catastrophic war? For Americans there are two items to ponder: what actions did we fail to take to avoid war and what circumstances caused such military unpreparedness. We need to forsake some of our righteousness and innocence regarding the causes of the war. Instead of directing our anger at the Japanese for their treachery or Roosevelt for his alleged iniquity we need to reflect upon the continuation of the racist attitudes that caused the Pearl Harbor attack to be such a military disaster. After all had the contemporary Americans trusted Japanese living in Hawaii the Japanese Navy could never have inflicted such catastrophic damages. As a nation we should abandon naive views that we have no real national interests and always act altruistically. Adopting the style of the Western cowboy

movie which portrays ourselves as the good guy and Japan as the robber-bad guy results in half-truths. This view of our foreign policy results in an overly simplistic and distorted view of our history, the Pacific War, and Japan. It is neither good history nor a contribution to an understanding of the problems of diplomacy. For Japanese the issues should be two: First, why they have such a difficult time accepting responsibility for their actions from 1931 to 1945. The need for Japanese to make a clear apology to their victims in East and Southeast Asia is paramount. No really effective partnership with those neighbors in this region for achieving economic, political, cultural and security objectives can be achieved until Japanese contrition and monetary retribution are made. Second, Japanese need to reflect more deeply on the weaknesses within their system and society that drove them down such a blind alley of aggression without considering sufficiently the horrible consequences for themselves and their victims in the Pacific and East and Southeast Asia.

NOTES

[1] Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 582–83. My emphasis.

[2] Linden, Glenn M., Brink, Dean C., Huntington, Richard H., Legacy of Freedom, *A History of the United States* (River Forest: Laidlaw Bros., 1986), 617, 620.

[3] Duke, Benjamin, "The Pacific War in Japanese And American High Schools: A Comparison of the Textbook Teachings," *Comparative Education*, V, 1 (February 1969): 78–81.

[4] "Americans See Japan as Ally and Threat, Poll Finds," *The Japan Times*, November 25, 1991.

[5] Daniel J. Boorstin, Brooks M. Kelley, with Ruth Boorstin, Annotated Teachers Edition, *A History of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1989) pl. 567.

[6] Hilary Conroy and Harry Wray, eds., *Pearl Harbor Examined, Prologue to the Pacific War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 1.

[7] *Asahi Shimbun*, Nov. 3, 1991.

[8] Robert P. Green, Jr., Laura L. Becker, and Robert E. Coviello, *The American Tradition* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1984), 554.

[9] Henry N. Drewry, Thomas H. O'Connor, and Frank Freidel, *America Is* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co, 1982), 565, 570.

[10] Jonathan G. Utley, "The United States Entry into the Pacific War," 1991 Sophia University Symposium, *World War II and 50 Years After*, Dec. 7, 1991, 5.

[11] Harry Eagar, "*Pearl Harbor Re-examined* would like us to believe war was avoid-

able," *The Maui News*, Sunday, March 4, 1990.

[12] John K. Emmerson, "Principles Versus Realities, in Wray and Conroy, 43; Marius B. Jansen, "The Pacific War and the Twentieth Century," Paper given at the International Conference Fifty Years After—The Pacific War Re-examined, November 14–17, 1991, Lake Yamanaka, Japan. Pearl Harbor was referred to as "the strongest fortress in the world" (14).

[13] Jansen, 13–14.

[14] Chihiro Hosoya, "Miscalculations in Deterrent Policy: U. S.–Japanese Relations, 1938–1941," *Pearl Harbor Reexamined,* 51–62.

[15] Prange, 334.

[16] Slackman, 281.

[17] Utley, 9.

[18] Duke, 79.

[19] Boorstin et. al., 554.

[20] Good examples of such treatment are: Paul Lewis Todd and Merle Curti, *Rise of the American Nation* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), II:304; Green et. al, 510.

[21] Boorstin et. al, 564.

[22] Utley, 14. Stimson, however, must be given credit for the American decision not to bomb Kyoto.

[23] Prange, 451–52, 467–68.

[24] "ABC Reveals War Plan," *Daily Yomiuri,* November 25, 1991.

[25] Prange, 839–50; Slackman, 297–303.

[26] Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1990, 400–402.

[27] Slackman, ch. 3, 281–82.

[28] Slackman, p. 301; Alvin D. Coox, "Repulsing the Pearl Harbor Revisionists: The State of Present Literature on the Debacle," in Wray and Conroy, *Pearl Harbor Reexamined,* 119–127.

[29] Slackman, 32.

[30] Utley, 11; Jonathan G. Utley, "Cordell Hull and the Diplomacy of Inflexibility," in Wray and Conroy, eds, 75–83.

[31] "Remember Pearl Harbor," *Daily Yomiuri,* Saturday, November 2, 1991.